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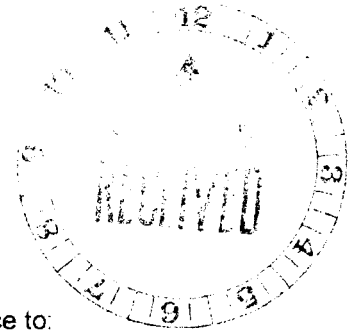
Chantal A. Patton  
323 Watson Rd.  
Travelers Rest, SC 29690-2222  
October 2, 2005

Mr. Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary, Surface Transportation Board  
1925 K. St., NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

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Dear Sir:

This letter is addressed to the Federal Surface Transportation Board, with reference to:  
STB Docket No. AB-490-1-X  
Greenville County Economic Development Corporation Petition for Exemption for Partial  
Discontinuance and Partial Abandonment in Greenville County, SC

My family and I have resided in Travelers Rest, South Carolina, for twenty years. My husband is a professor at Furman University, and our three sons have grown up here and still live in the vicinity. Our daughter-in-law grew up in a neighboring county. My husband and I currently live within about a quarter mile of the railroad right-of-way, so we are very interested in its history, as well as its future use.

When we first arrived in Travelers Rest (in northern Greenville County), it was a relatively quiet little town, with few traffic problems, although two highways crisscross the town. A charming feature was the weekly passage of the Greenville & Northern train, or the "Swamp Rabbit," as it was affectionately called by long-time, local residents. The train literally passed through (diagonally across) an intersection of Highway 276, where McElhaney Road (on one side) and Center Street (on the other side) meet, in an older section of town.

Before reaching that intersection, the train crawled through a parking lot, passing a series of store-fronts, including the town's library. Because parking was scarce, people occasionally parked their cars on the train tracks. The train only crept along at about 5 miles per hour, and the conductor (or the engineer) would stop, descend from the train, enter the library, and ask patrons who had parked cars on the tracks to please move them. Then the train would mosey on through that intersection in the middle of town, until it reached the northernmost business, which was the Air Products Plant, about a mile north of Travelers Rest.

During the time we have lived here, only four businesses, to my knowledge, were served by the Greenville & Northern train. About eight years ago, when the rail line service was discontinued, Air Products closed its plant, as did two others of the four plants. The company which owned the tracks, RailTex, did not have the means to maintain them safely or reconstruct portions of the line which were in disrepair. I had served on a community panel at the Air Products plant, and we were told that the cost of repairs was more than Air Products, or RailTex, or all businesses combined, wished to invest.

Within a couple years, a number of Greenville County residents were delighted to learn that the Greenville & Northern right-of-way was acquired by the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation, which was created by the Greenville County Government to preserve the route for future use, either as a rail line, or as a pedestrian path. Meanwhile, the County also sponsored community gatherings at which recreational use of the railway line was discussed, as well as its potential ties to recreational facilities and to the path of the Reedy River, which the railway line parallels along its way south into the City of Greenville.

Eventually, a number of citizens expressed interest in a "greenway" connecting northern Greenville County and Lake Conestee, south of the City of Greenville, again paralleling the path of the Reedy River and its tributaries. With the development of such a project in mind, a number of volunteers (including members of our family) participated in several clean-up efforts last spring and summer, and cleared the railway right-of-way of brush, small trees, and trash, which had accumulated over time, and through disuse of the tracks.

We rediscovered what a delightful pathway we have nearby, connecting northern and southern Greenville County, and beyond, if it is eventually tied to other "greenways" from other points in South Carolina.

To be fair, there has also been discussion of light rail service, but the re-establishment of such service seems both impractical and prohibitively expensive. In the near future, a new high school will open in our town, within a quarter mile (north) of the intersection where the "Swamp Rabbit" used to cross Main Street, in Travelers Rest. Surrounding residential areas have also grown, and the traffic is projected to increase markedly, rendering the traditional crossing obsolete. Actually accommodating, as well as anticipating increases in traffic, the rails have been paved over with asphalt in a number of places.

The "Swamp Rabbit" derived its name because it traveled through many swampy areas, where tracks now would have to be restored. In a number of those areas, flooding has been a real problem. Bridges, and other portions of the railroad, are in disrepair.

So our community's focus, and the focus of Greenville County and City officials, of Furman University and of outdoor clubs, has been on recreational opportunities. We would prefer to see the Greenville & Northern Railroad right-of-way converted into a "greenway" path. Students from Furman will be able to walk to Travelers Rest, while our city's residents can walk or bike to Furman. Further, the more adventurous hikers can travel the length of the County on foot, from north to south (or vice versa) following, also, the path of the Reedy River through the City of Greenville. The recreational and health benefits are evident. Restoration of local industries is less desirable. While we will definitely miss the "Swamp Rabbit," its retirement was inevitable.

On behalf of our community and County, we respectfully ask that you vote against the request filed by Mr. Steven Hawkins, president of the Western Carolina Railway Service, to purchase the Greenville & Northern right-of-way. We would prefer to continue with our "Rails to Trails" project, for public use, as part of the "Greenville County Greenway," in cooperation with the "Lake Conestee Foundation." To that end, we ask that a petition for abandonment of service on the 11.8-mile Greenville & Northern Railroad, which has been filed with the Federal Surface Transportation Board on behalf of Greenville County, and its wholly-owned non-profit Greenville County Economic Development Corporation, be granted.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Chantal A. Patton

"CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE"

I hereby certify that on this 3rd day of October, 2005, a copy of the foregoing document was served by the United States Post Office to:

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